



Vienna Inmates Cleanup Brookport



By Evie Allen and By Jared Roberts

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BROOKPORT -- Inmates from the Vienna Correctional Center are bringing more manpower as the community continues to recover from the November 17th storm.

The Dixon Springs Impact Incarceration Program requires them to work in the community, giving them the chance to see life through other people's eyes.

Bucket by bucket, the inmate cleanup crew spent Thursday clearing out trash and debris in Brookport.

"It's easy to understand that there's a tornado but it's a lot different when you come here and actually see what happened yourself," says Inmate Mercer.

The tornado that touched down in Brookport last November affected many lives, which was a big wake up call for Inmate Mercer.

"This is people's items and household stuff and it's just gone," says Mercer.

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Mercer is part of a 120-day rehabilitation program offered at the the Vienna Correctional Facility. The program is for non-violent offenders ages 18 to 35. Superintendent Jason Henton says it's designed to encourage community involvement through service and helping others.

"If we can change something in their mind, in their heart and then send them out into the community better than when they came to us, or maybe reestablish something that actually was implanted in them years ago, that they just lost their way and lost track," he says.

The work also allows a sentence of up to 8 years to be reduced to 120 days. Henton says the program can be challenging, especially in extreme weather. Thursday's work required extra measures to deal with the cold.

"With the insulated clothing, with the gloves, with the jackets to make sure that we don't have any issues with our inmates because their safety is first and foremost a priority with our program," says Henton.

But Mercer says the cold was the last thing on his mind; being in Brookport changed the way he views life.

"It's easy to be self-centered. It's a lot harder to look beyond yourself, to try to help other people. And that's what we need to do as a community as a whole," says Mercer.

The Illinois Emergency Management Agency can call on the inmate program to assist in relief efforts. The prisoners will continue helping with clean up Friday.